U. S. Congress. Senate.

CHEAP LITERATURE IN THE MAILS.

STATEMENTS BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON POST-OFFICES AND POST-ROADS IN REGARD TO THE PRIVILEGES ACCORDED THE PUBLISHERS OF CHEAP LITERATURE.

MONDAY, *April* 9, 1888.

The committee having under consideration H. R. 4910 to amend section 14 of the Act approved March 3, 1879, relating to second-class mail matter.

REMARKS OF COL. DONN PIATT.

Mr. CHAIRMAN AND GENTLEMEN OF THE COMMITTEE: I am very glad of the opportunity given Mr. Spofford and myself of addressing you on this subject. We have something to say that we think is of interest on a subject that we know is of great importance.

In return for your courtesy we will try to be as brief as possible in the presentation of our case, remembering the admonition of the eminent judge to a young attorney that it would save some time and labor if he would try to remember that the court knew something.

We appear here this morning in behalf of three separate parties:

First, the Post-Office Department, that complains of being overburdened with mercantile matter; second, in behalf of authors and honest publishers of the United States who complain of an unjust discrimination in freight; and third and lastly, in behalf of the outraged conscience of the country; and in that we volunteer. In that direction we have not been retained.

Some years since the Government of the United States undertook to do an express business through the mails. The law was an imitation of the English statutes to that effect, and the authors of our legal enactment forgot, if they ever knew, the difference of conditions in the two countries. And they forgot, also, the wide difference in our forms of government.

While the population of England, Ireland, and Scotland are crowded into a space less than that of Pennsylvania and Ohio, our population is spread over a vast continent, and the consequence is that the difference of transportation makes that a burden to us which is a benefit to Great Britain.

The CHAIRMAN. I was out for a moment. Do you state that England has passed such a law as this bill proposes?

Mr. PIATT. Yes, sir; our efforts at an express business through the mails were copied from the English system. What I am talking about, Mr. Chairman, is the attempt to carry merchandise through the post-

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offices of the United States. There is a difference between our form of government which makes that a hazardous experiment.

Messrs. Senators, we may as well recognize the fact first as last that the fathers who not only created our Republic, but gave it in its start a fixed construction, drew the line clearly and distinctly between its legitimate and constitutional exercise of political power and private enterprise. Putting in a brief space our Constitution, that looks only to an equality before the law that protects the citizen in his political rights, they left to that citizen all the business pursuits through which he makes a living or accumulates a fortune. The only anomaly to this was in our post-office, and, strange as it may sound, I regard it as a great misfortune, for it opens the door, by example, to all other aggressions upon the sacred rights of the citizen. It not alone undertook to carry the letters, but the newspapers of the people. Time was when the power thus privileged was a conveyance of intelligence. The press sought through able writing to make attractive certain opinions, mostly of a political sort. It has come to be merely a process of advertising, made attractive by its energy and enterprise in promulgating the news. The Government can as well undertake to carry the oysters of the people as the news and advertising of the people, and now we have an attempt made to transport the merchandise.

The same argument holds good for other innovations in this direction. We have, for example, 150,000 miles of operating railway.

This vast iron net-work that distributes all our products has passed under the control, and virtually into the ownership, of some sixty families, that tax our products, as Senators Sherman, Conkling, and Windom once reported to your honorable body—the Senate—in a way and to an extent that Congress dare not attempt. The popular remedy for this abuse is to have the Government own and operate the railroads. We have at this moment an Interstate Commission in session, attempting to regulate freights. It is enough to make a believer in our Constitution shudder at such an innovation, for it is the highway to a complete ownership of private institutions in a public work so great that the common mind can not comprehend the amount.

Now, without stopping to consider the evil that would surely follow an accession of this vast investment to the ownership of the General Government, the addition of its power to our already burdensome and vitiated official patronage is simply appalling. Our Government in something less than a century has developed clearly and positively into a Government of parties. We have had, and must ever have, two well-defined political organizations that have lost in their organization the purposes and objects for which they were originally organized. Now the party out of power has no rights that the party in power is bound to respect; add to this the wealth and patronage of this vast investment that dominates the entire business of the land, and we build above us a despotism and a corruption that would be without parallel on the civilized globe. There is no authority so autocratic, cruel, and intolerant as that of a majority, and when we carry this into our homes, counting-rooms, and fields, we have made practical the dream of the communists.

The abuses complained of by the people in our present railroad system are unquestionably great. One has but to study the elaborate and able two years' investigation to learn how these common carriers gather up the hard earnings of an industrious people to return the profits of the many to the exclusive benefit of the few. We are taught the process, then, that punctuates the land with castles for stolen capital and hovels for unrequited toil. We see in this free land of ours, once the happy

home of industry, the gulf widen and deepen between the very rich and the extremely poor. Our people are patient under wrong and long-suffering, but there is a limit to this, and already the demand is heard and grows stronger day by day for the Government to give relief by taking this distribution of products to itself. The remedy is worse than the wrong. What we suffer now is disease. The change to that called for would be death—death to the great Republic and to all our rights so far recognized by our Constitution. We are slow to learn the great truth that we suffer more from a power to abuse than in the abuse of power. Legalize a wrong, and greed limits itself only to the legality.

Again, here is the telegraph, that science made the poor man's post-office—for it consists of a wire, a pole, a boy, and a battery—made a luxury for the rich, owned and controlled by one man. Already the people are knocking at the bronze doors of Congress for relief in having the Government do their telegraphing. What sort of consistency is there in our Government carrying merchandise, and even letters, through the mails, and refuse to do the telegraphing.

It is time to call a halt. I have given but two instances out of a hundred of like evils.

After this introduction, which I consider necessary to a better understanding of our case, I come to the matter in hand. The Government, seeking to be paternal, undertook the carrying and distribution of newspapers. To make the favor as broad as possible, this included not only the daily and weekly press, but monthly publications that came in under the head of periodicals. Seizing upon that one word, certain designing publishers offered the post-office unbound books, which they called "libraries," published, or rather republished (for they are nearly all of foreign production), at stated intervals, and claimed the privilege of second class-matter, because they were republished at stated intervals.

Strange to say, this definition received the sanction of the Attorney-General at the time. Immediately a trade grew up that, burdening our mails, sent a cheap reprint of European trash to every home in the land. The freight swelled into tons, until, and I am authorized by the accomplished and able Third Assistant Postmaster-General to say that, if it is continued, our postal cars will have to be transformed to freight cars to save them from being broken down. He says, in addition, that the labor of postal agents is so augmented that the promptness of the New York post-office is seriously impaired. He can, he says, mail a letter on the cars at any time, and have it carried a hundred miles with a more prompt delivery than attends a drop letter in New York. For a publishing-house at New York to do the business thus imposed on the Government by half-a dozen firms would call for a building as large as the New York post-office. Here is a specimen of a book that is transported by our mails as a periodical. (Exhibits a paper-covered volume.)

Mr. MITCHELL. What is your definition of a periodical as used in the law?

Mr. PIATT. Periodical, as used in the law, and as evidently intended by its framers, is the popular common acceptation of the word. Regularity of publication is only one of its attributes. Through this common and popular use it has taken on a technical meaning in the trade. It means a monthly or quarterly work in print, bound in paper, published for subscribers at regular intervals, and containing miscellaneous matter more labored and profound than that of newspapers, and less so than that given in a book. There is no man in or out of the trade that, if asked the meaning of a periodical, will not say Harper's, Scribner's, The Century,

The Forum, Home Knowledge, or North American Review. In like manner the word "book" has its meaning based on popular or common use.

Mr. SAULSBURY. In your definition you instance Harper's, The Century, The Forum, and others of that class. Are you not aware that a large majority of these publications are issued, not to subscribers, but are furnished upon the market, and are carried and hawked through the cars, for sale, and at news-stands and everywhere else, just the same as other merchandise?

Mr. PIATT. When they are sold in that way they are first furnished to subscribers, such as the news-stands or the car-agents. They are ordered at the home office precisely as your order would be were you to remit the money and subscribe for a year.

Mr. SAULSBURY. Are they, as matters of fact, publications issued by subscription? I have bought on the cars several of these publications to which I was not a subscriber.

Mr. PIATT. Before you bought, Senator, the number you purchased had been ordered as a subscription. You encountered and dealt with the third man. If you bought directly of the publishers, it would be an incident and not the object of the business. The subscription is the basis of the trade, and every number sold is sworn to as a part of the subscription.

Mr. SAULSBURY. They would swear to a thing which is not the fact. If you are going to confine this to periodicals according to your definition, if they are to have special advantages, according to the definition that you have given them, all excess of their subscriptions ought to go as the others.

Mr. PIATT. I am much obliged, Senator, for your questions. They fetch us to the fact that in the construction of laws words are accepted in their common meaning as they must have struck the mind of the lawmaker, and are intended to affect the minds of courts and the people. But we are not done with it. These republications are put out under the name of libraries—not as periodicals—libraries published periodically, having one attribute only of the periodical. They dare not use that word, and a library means what is intended for such a book. Periodicals change their character when bound in volumes for shelves, and this cannot be applied to the periodical when being distributed. There is confession of fraud in the very name that is so impudently used.

Now, Senators, there is grave wrong done in this abuse to the literature and science of our country. Authors of the United States have had and are having a hard time of it. This Government may be paternal to the press, to pig-iron, and other material interests, but it is the hardest of step-parents to its brain workers. Owing to an absence of an international copyright, there is no property in books to the makers of books. Our publishers can go to Europe and help themselves to any works without paying for them, and supply our market with these stolen goods. I, a citizen of the United States, can go to one of our publishers with a work that is the result of a lifetime of preparation and years of hard labor, and the publisher says to me, "Why should I risk the cost of publishing your book and pay you a royalty, when I can go to Europe and get successes without the loss of a cent." If the poor author publishes at his own cost, an European pirate of a publisher can in like manner help himself to the property.

This hard competition has been and is supplemented by our Government carrying the stolen trash in the mails at one cent a pound. It

looks as if the great Republic had gone into partnership with the thieves to facilitate the sale of the plunder. An American author can not compete with this cheap publication. Competition has brought the price down until the American News Company makes all the profit the publisher can spare. Then, to put a good book in the form this trash has, is to damn it in the eyes of all thoughtful readers. A land without a literature is a land without a soul. We have trampled on and done our utmost to destroy all that puts heroism to record, all that inspires youth and softens age. We have driven scientists to naught and made paupers of our poets, historians, and teachers. The literature we have I am proud of, but we have forced it to grow, as some plants will, by being trampled on.

I want this bill passed to a law. I desire, however, that it should be so amended as to give our native authors the privilege that is so generously given the press and has been awarded so many years to cheap reprints. We certainly may ask such a favor at your hands. I offer you here an amendment which admits to the privilege of second-class matter books written by authors of the United States and published by publishers of this country. And I ask also in an amendment that the republication of English classics shall have the like privilege. There is no danger of such incumbering the mails, and I have the sanction of the Post-Office Department for the request.

There is yet another view to be taken of this subject, and I shall briefly state it, and then give way to my friend, Mr. Spofford, who has given the subject more study and preparation than ill-health would permit in me.

It is this: When I appeared before you on the 19th of last February, at the instance of Belford, Clarke & Co., the entire time of the committee was taken up by an advocate that I understand appeared for the American News Company. I was amazed to find him claiming for this class of literature that it was healthy, and in every respect the sort of reading to be given the American public. In illustration of this he showed you a number of Lovell's Library, made up of Emerson's essays. Now, as I came here, I picked this book up at a news-stand that has a list of books put upon the market by one of these firms. I doubt whether you Senators ever indulge in such literature, but if you will look into it you will be shocked at what you have aided in a widespread distribution of. There are, it is true, Cooper's novels, and one copy of Emerson. A few good books appear to sanctify the lot, but their good books are not sold. The trade is maintained on the bad ones. I would like you Senators to take a look at this list.

Mr. CHACE. I would not be any wiser by the list. I should not know the difference when I saw them.

Mr. PIATT. Well, I can not ask you to occupy your valuable time in a study of the books themselves. They are made of Miss Braddon's bigamy novels, Ouida's adultery fictions, and translations from the French that are worse than all. I must not be understood as asserting that these works are not entertaining. They are written by people of genius, who make their work fascinating, evil as it is.

Now, Senators, the facts of the situation are simply these: Our common-school system has turned out millions of people taught to read, and hungry for reading, without that culture necessary to guide one to the best reading. A distinguished author and diplomat has said that "we are the best educated and poorest cultured people on earth." I doubt the education. By education in its true sense we mean that exercise of the faculties that enables one to think. As only one man in twenty

thousand is capable of thinking, we can see how impossible it is to educate all.

The common school, then, is only a cultivation of the memory, and all the good there is in a memory of facts it gives. We can not educate all the people, then, but we can give them a moral training—that God has made possible. What becomes of the moral training of our youth while a paternal Government is spreading broadcast this vicious but fascinating literature to gratify the hungry readers of our common schools? We are poisoning our homes, and, through that, sapping the foundations of our great Republic. The fathers taught that our free Government was based on the virtue and intelligence of the people. We attack the virtue, and are loading down our mails with that which furnishes food for poor-houses and penitentiaries. Small wonder that divorces keep step with marriages, that our cashiers and trustees find refuge in Canada, and nearly all our business has come to be mere gambling and fraud.

I thank you, Senators, for the patience with which you have heard me.

REMARKS OF MR. A. R. SPOFFORD, LIBRARIAN OF CONGRESS.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I may say at the outset that I am here in consequence of a resolution of the American Library Association, adopted at their meeting in Milwaukee sometime ago, which sets forth, in substance, that—"Whereas by the legislation of Congress periodicals and cheap books in unbound form are carried in the mails at the lowest postal rate of 1 cent a pound, and the distribution of books from libraries at equally low rates would tend to promote the intelligence of the people, that this association recommend such legislation as will enable libraries to distribute books as second-class matter."

The members of the subcommittee of the Library Association saw the Postmaster General, and we found, about a year ago, that while he was in favor of so amending the law as to favor libraries, if there were any discrimination exercised, he was opposed to the existing law, which gives this privilege of an extraordinarily cheap rate of transportation to cheap literature, and was about to bring before Congress a measure for its repeal. That measure has since passed the House of Representatives and is before your honorable committee. I may say in addition that, after conference with my colleagues, the librarians of the country, so far as we know, are unanimously in favor of this bill as it passed the House, unless we could secure an amendment to the present law which would give to all books the same privilege of cheap transit through the mails.

Mr. CHACE. Do I understand now that your association, if you can have added to this law a provision that libraries can be included within the provisions of the law, would be willing it should stand?

Mr. SPOFFORD. No, sir; not unless it should be amended so as to include all books; the good books as well as the poor ones. We are for fair play and the greatest good to the greatest number, as we understand it. If we wanted a special privilege we should come before you, as these interests have done, and endeavor to influence the committees of Congress to report a bill in the interest of public intelligence; to give to every library in the United States free transit on all books sent to or from that library from any part of the country, so that we could buy our books without expense for transportation. We do not want "a part of the pork," to use a common simile.

We do want fair play and equal rights before the law. The opponents of this bill have had their day before your committee and it seems but fair to present, through your courtesy, some other facts in the case, which, as I believe, you have not yet heard, except from my friend Mr. Piatt, who has presented one phase of it, that relating to American authors. I say nothing of that, except that I should be very glad to see it carried out if there is any special privilege to be maintained in the carriage of books in the mails.

I think a special privilege can be defended only upon one ground, and that is, that it works a benefit to the community.

Mr. CHACE. That is sound.

Mr. SPOFFORD. On this question, whether the carriage of these cheap libraries at nominal rates does on the whole work a greater good than injury, there is room for a wide difference of opinion. I propose to submit to you a few facts which are largely drawn from my experience as a librarian.

I have found (and it is the experience of all old librarians) that people, old and young, will read the most that which is most frequently put before them. What is most easily procured is, in nine cases out of ten, the surest to occupy the attention. Now, by your laws, you have given an enormous facility of circulation to a certain class of literature—namely, that published in a quasi periodical form. Yet, is it in any true sense of the term "periodical literature?" I need not ask whether a complete book published fifty or a hundred years ago is a periodical. Does it make it any more a periodical to reprint it with a fresh date? Why should you carry through the mails at a loss a whole ton of Dickens's "Oliver Twist," published in 1837, or two tons of Miss Austen's novels, first published in 1812, on the plea that they are periodicals issued in this year of our Lord? Are these tons of novels, first issued before we were born, periodicals? They are books, pure and simple, by any definition, unless it be one which insults the intelligence of Congress.

Mr. MITCHELL. The Department has ruled, as I understand, that they were periodicals.

Mr. SPOFFORD. The Department so ruled—under what influences is familiar to you—under the plea that popular intelligence was to be largely promoted if books were very cheaply published, and that if the Government would only go into the partnership to cheapen the cost and facilitate the circulation still further, intelligence would be still more widely diffused, and that would be a public benefit. That is certainly open to question, in the light of what has actually been published and diffused in these cheap libraries.

In the year 1879 the great newspaper and periodical interest, always a most powerful influence in this country, came and got Congress to reduce to 2 cents a pound the postage on newspapers; and afterwards the publishers of the cheap libraries of fiction, and the great distributors of cheap literature, came before the Postmaster-General and secured the ruling just referred to, namely: That these books are periodicals within the meaning of the law. Was this the intent of Congress when that body passed the act of 1879? Let us take a look at the act, section 14 of which is referred to in the bill before you:

> The periodical must be originated and published for the dissemination of information of a public character, or devoted to literature, the sciences, arts, or some special industry, and having a legitimate list of subscribers (20 U. S. Stats., 359).

Now, then, do these books convey information of a public character, these cheap novels? Are they devoted to literature, to the sciences,

to the arts, to some special industry? Do they have a legitimate subscription list? Possibly they have, but in what other respect do they comply with the conditions fixed by Congress to entitle them to pass as periodicals?

But, not satisfied with this special privilege of cheap mail carriage at 2 cents a pound, these interests again came to Congress in 1885, and persuaded you to reduce postage on cheap books and periodicals still further, to only 1 cent a pound. They also secured in addition the privilege of mailing from news agencies to all other news agents these libraries of cheap literature; so that the Post-Office Department has been made a great freight carrier in the special interest of one class of books, and that the least valuable. (23 Stats. at Large, 387.)

Your legislation, as interpreted, has made it the duty of the Post-Office Department to transport from New York to farthest Oregon these libraries of cheap novels at 1 cent a pound, whereas we have got to pay 8 cents a pound for every other class of literature, American or foreign. Is that equitable? Is it fair? Is it even decent? Is it not a special privilege of an odious and exceptional character, which has been conveyed through a most elastic interpretation on the part of the authorities of the law which I have just read?

Now, let me illustrate this in a single object-lesson. I hold in my hand Professor S. P. Langley's recent book called "A New Astronomy," published in New York the present year, a most valuable publication, embodying the latest discoveries in the science of astronomy, by the present secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. The book weighs 3½ pounds. At the present rate for all books except these cheap libraries (1 cent for every 2 ounces) the postage on this single book is 28 cents.

If it be sent to me at Washington from New York, I have to pay 28 cents on that book. Here are twelve numbers of the Seaside Library, also weighing three and a half pounds. These can be sent to any part of the United States to a news agent or subscriber at the rate of 1 cent a pound, or 3½ cents for this whole pile of books in one hand, as against 28 cents for the one book I hold in the other.

You will notice the difference in bulk; that is a very important item in your mail transportation. This package (the Seasides), as you will see, is in bulk about one and a half times larger than the book, which is charged eight times as much. This matter fills up the postal cars to an inordinate degree, making vastly more bulk, vastly more expense, and requires much more rolling stock in order to carry it than the better classes of literature.

Now, they say—the opponents of this bill—that they have got a certain privilege in the mails, which, if you take it away, it will be doing them a great injustice. So, years ago, when you repealed the fishing bounties, the Maine fishermen thought you were doing them a great injustice. Yet it was done, probably in accordance with the policy of doing the greatest good to the greatest number.

They say you will do an injury to the diffusion of intelligence; whereas the fact is that they have enjoyed a monopoly of cheap transit for many years, have made much money by it, and now when asked to relinquish the privilege in the interest of all classes they say it is a hardship; and they ask that the people who have to make up the great yearly postal deficit shall continue to pay their bills in perpetuity because they have paid them so long. If Congress had known these facts in advance it is probable that the act would never have been passed. Quite unwittingly Congress made the regulation by which the Government puts its hands into the pockets of the general public, takes out between one and

two million dollars, as the Postmaster-General has shown, and puts it into the pockets of a few men living in the city of New York.

Mr. CHACE. Under this provision here, after line 10 to the end, how would a magazine be affected—Harper's, or the Century, or any of those magazines that have been named?

Mr. SPOFFORD [reading the bill]:

No publications that are but books, or reprints of books, whether issued in parts or entire, shall be admitted to the mails as second-class mail matter.

I do not see how any fair interpretation could exclude the Century or any other periodical, quarterly, or monthly.

Mr. CHACE. At the time of the enactment of this law the simple intention of Congress was to cheapen the transportation of good literature published periodically.

Mr. SPOFFORD. I take it for granted from the language of the act.

Mr. CHACE. It was an honest, good, beneficent intention to confer a public benefit, but your contention is, and not without great merit, that these people have modified their publications so that they come within the provisions of the law.

Mr. SPOFFORD. They have. We never heard of a book as a periodical until after this law was passed.

Mr. CHACE. What I want to ask is this: Suppose that we make this amendment to the law, and suppose that they—the publishers of these libraries—have articles printed in them, contributed by some writer, that are serial in their nature, just like the serial articles that come out of the other magazines. Then would they or would they not have the characteristics of books?

Mr. SPOFFORD. I think they are ingenious enough to do what you suggest, but they could not do it with regard to all their books. And I think the Department would be very chary in giving them a privilege to carry out a subterfuge intended to evade your law.

Now, this discrimination extends very wide and very far. It gives in the first place to the foreign author a special advantage over the American author. Why? Simply because, without saying so in the law, the effect of it is to distribute at this cheap rate about ninety foreign books to ten American books. That is about the proportion of American books these libraries send out. Out of the 2,080 Seaside Library publications there are less than 75 American books among them. The Franklin Square Library embraces in its lists 599 foreign and only 20 American books. The Lovell-Library gives 228 American books to 913 books by foreign writers.

The CHAIRMAN. They are reprinted in this country, are they not?

Mr. SPOFFORD. They are reprinted in this country.

Mr. CHACE. Very largely their American publications are from books of which the copyrights have run out.

Mr. SPOFFORD. Yes, sir; old books like Cooper's novels; and they showed you Emerson's essays, a single volume of which they had printed. But they failed to print the ten other volumes of Emerson, the work of his riper years, because the copyrights have not run out. It used to be an American doctrine that we should encourage our own; but this legislation encourages foreign literature at the expense of American books, by endowing it with a special privilege.

In the next place, this law gives fiction an advantage over fact, by carrying these cheap libraries at a rate of postage just eight times cheaper than all other books; because, strange as it may appear, from 85 to 95 per cent. of the editions of books thus favored are novels. In

Lovell's Library, out of 1,142 publications issued, 1,031 are works of fiction, and only 111 are miscellaneous books. In the Franklin Square Library there are 510 works of fiction and 109 of history, biography, poetry, and other miscellaneous literature. In the Seaside Library a still greater proportion of fiction is found. Thus the Government stands in the attitude, by carrying broadcast through the land this enormous mass of fiction for a merely nominal freight, of favoring the least instructive class of books at the expense of the most instructive. Books of science, religion, and literature generally are unfairly discriminated against. To send the Bible through the mail costs eight times as much per ounce as it costs to send these trashy novels, most which are of no benefit to the people. On what principle of justice can this discrimination be defended?

As to the effects of an undue pursuit of novel reading upon the mind, let me quote to you the judgment of Thomas Jefferson, in a letter written in 1818, the fruit of the matured judgment of that ripe scholar and statesman:

> A great obstacle to good education is the inordinate passion prevalent for novels, and the time lost in that reading which should be instructively employed. When this passion infects the mind it destroys its tone, and revolts it against wholesome reading. Reason and fact, plain and unadorned, are rejected. Nothing can engage attention unless dressed in all the figments of fancy, and nothing so bedecked comes amiss. The result is a bloated imagination, sickly judgment, and disgust towards all the real business of life.

Now, as a librarian, I confirm that, and say in addition that I am sorry that by the legislation of Congress this literature has been so encouraged, fostered, and spread abroad that it has fairly flooded the country. The public taste is being educated everywhere upon false and unreal and demoralizing standards. They call this education. It is educating the people in a morbid appetite for fiction, educating them in foreign ideas instead of American ones, educating them in aristocracy in place of republican democracy, educating them in a taste for the unwholesome brood of novels, instead of the works of the great masters of thought. This inordinate passion for novel-reading grows by what it feeds on. It occupies the mind with false and unreal pictures, it weakens the will, it makes dreamers instead of thinkers and workers, and it insidiously saps the very foundations of intellectual and moral strength in our community.

But the worst side of this question I have not yet touched, and that is the wide diffusion of what, for want of a better name, may be termed the "bigamy" school of fiction. I mean the writings of such novelists as Ouida, Adolphe Belot, Du Boisgobey, Dumas the younger, and the coarse and brutal pictures of Emile Zola.

There are many novels of that class which every librarian who has any regard for the morals of the community deplores the existence of—novels which depict, sometimes in the most seductive, sometimes in the most repulsive aspects, the decline and the fall of woman—novels in which, where there is not a seduction, there is an adultery, and where there is not an adultery, there is a seduction, and very frequently there are both. Now, what kind of literature is that to bring into domestic circles—to be put forth by the thousands, and scattered all over your country, to the exclusion, or at least to the prejudice, of decent and elevating literature?

The CHAIRMAN. Is it not possible that we might frame a law that will shut out all that and would not shut out all this better literature?

Mr. SPOFFORD. I do not think it is. No censorship is possible in this country, even were it desirable. You must begin the cure lower down,

in the education of the young mind. All you can do by legislation is to deny to this unwholesome brood of novels the advantage it has got unwittingly through your laws.

If you cut this literature off from the especial favor it now enjoys and profits by in the mails, as the House bill does, what can there be better than that? Lately, by your legislation, you are instituting inquiries into the statistics of divorce in the United States. This social evil has so increased as to have become a national question. How much of the plentiful crop of divorces which have grown up under a lax morality, which has led to lax divorce legislation in so many States, is due to this very cause which we are now considering? A very large proportion of the loose morality which is abroad in the community, and to which so much of misery, of murder, and of crime in connection with the relations of the sexes, is due, is attributable directly to the depicting in these novels of the attractiveness of vice.

The poet tells you that—

> Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
> As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;
> Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
> We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

Vice is made too familiar to the mind in the pages of many modern novels, and especially in those of the French school, of which an increasing number are translated and widely read. The young insensibly absorb from the bad books, many of which go in these cheap libraries, the seeds of vice which bear fruit afterwards in social disorder. The weakening of the sanctity of the marriage tie and the wreck of families are often directly traceable to the powerful and insidious influence of bad reading, just as the young boys who run away from home to play the robber and bandit in a small way, drink in the base incentive to crime in the lives of outlaws and heroes of the highway, in the "penny-dreadful" stories which form a minor class of this library literature so much vaunted for its cheapness.

But, we are told, they published once the revised version of the Scriptures in these cheap libraries. Well, they could afford to do it, because it was in the nature of news when it was issued. And they have put out this volume of Emerson's essays, so that now they are able to plead that they have given to a few good and improving books a wide circulation. But I have given you the figures, which show over 90 per cent. of novels to less than 10 per cent. of other and more elevating literature. It reminds me of the satire in Shakespeare, when Falstaff's bill was presented:

> "Item, sauce, 4 pence. Item, sack, 2 gallons, 5*s*. 8*d*. Item, anchovies, and sack after supper, 2*s*. 6*d*. Item, bread, a ha' penny." O, monstrous! but one half-penny-worth of bread to this intolerable deal of sack!

And so it is here—such a pitiful morsel of good books to this intolerable deal of poor ones.

I don't wish to push this argument so far as to condemn all novels. There are few influences more powerful for good than a really good novel, but it is also true that there are none more powerful for mischief than a bad one. I am bound to add that of late years, under the stimulus of low prices and low freights, there has been a marvellous crop of bad ones. The competition is so sharp that they can not find a sufficient market for good works, and so instead of drawing from the pure "well of English undefiled," they are giving us this modern stuff translated from the French, which is very far from being either pure or undefiled.

What I have endeavored to present to you very imperfectly are facts, without any admixture of theory. I have had to deplore constantly as a librarian the undue reading of novels, whether good or bad, because there is so little discrimination exercised between the good and the bad. They lie together on the shelves of the book-stores and the library, and when the good are sought, the bad are there to take the attention of the community and especially of the young. They are put before them in these vast quantities, being fresh from the press, for I am glad to say that all this unclean brood of French novels, "the trail of the serpent" being over them all, is entirely modern—most of it within this generation. The market is filled and the country flooded with it.

Mr. CHACE. You don't think that Gresham's law applies to literature?

Mr. SPOFFORD. Not more certainly do unlimited issues of a cheap and debased currency drive out the gold, than does an unlimited circulation of cheap and flimsy literature drive out the valuable and the improving.

The CHAIRMAN. Suppose we should put the best books at a penny a pound on one copy to each subscriber, how much would that amount to?

Mr. SPOFFORD. Most books weigh pretty heavily, because they are generally bound, and it would be impossible for me to estimate the aggregate increase in postage. You might ask the Postmaster-General.

Mr. CHACE. Mr. Spofford, I believe it is the duty of the legislative branch of the Government to conserve the morals of the people. What, in your judgment, would be the best course; to put up the price, or, rather, to exclude this class of publications from the mails, or to reduce the rates upon books? Which would be the preferable course, in your judgment?

Mr. SPOFFORD. It addresses itself to you as custodians of the public welfare as well as of the public Treasury. My opinion on that would not be of much value. You had better ask the Postmaster-General. I think this, however——

The CHAIRMAN. There is a very great clamor as to taking away cheap postage. I get letters, not only in the Senate but outside, criticising my course in reporting back the bill for 1 cent postage adversely. There is quite a clamor, and they don't care whether the Post-Office Department pays or not. They care nothing about that.

Mr. SPOFFORD. That is a very deeply lodged idea in the public mind—that we want cheap postage. Now let me say, with regard to Mr. Chace's question, it is not denying these cheap libraries the privilege of the mails at all. By the House bill, as passed, they are simply put upon the same footing as other books. That is the whole of it.

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